

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PARIS 28097 250528Z

65

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5358

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION USUN

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 28097

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR FR SS MO AG

SUBJECT: QUAI VIEWS ON THE SAHARA

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF SEPTEMBER 23, QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR NORTH AFRICA TRISTAN D'ALBIS GAVE HIS OPINION THAT ALGERIA HAS CAUSE FOR SATISFACTION WITH THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE SAHARA, WHILE MOROCCO CAN TAKE COMFORT IN ITS DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES. POLISARIO REPORTS OF VICTORIES IN SOUTHERN MOROCCO MAY BE EXAGGERATED, BUT ARE NONETHELESS REAL; THE MOROCCANS HAVE SUFFERED RELATIVELY HEAVY CASUALTIES. MOREOVER, AS THE RAID ON NOUAKCHOTT DEMONSTRATED, POLISARIO HAS A MUCH GREATER CAPABILITY FOR ORGANIZATION AND FIGHTING THAN ANTICIPATED. HE CHARACTERIZED THE POSITION IN SOUGHERN MOROCCO AS ONE IN WHICH RABAT HOLDS A NUMBER OF FORTIFIED TOWNS WHILE POLISARIO HAS PRACTICALLY FREE MOVEMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, WITH NEITHER SIDE ABLE TO DISLODGE THE OTHER.

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PAGE 02 PARIS 28097 250528Z

2. DIPLOMATICALLY, THE MOROCCANS HAD RELATIVE SUCCESS AT BOTH PORT LOUIS AND COLOMBO. ALGERIAN HOPES FOR A BANKWAGON OF RECOGNITIONS FOR THE SAHRAOUI REPUBLIC HAVE BEEN DASHED AND THEIR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS ARE NOW CENTERED ON PRESSURES THEY HOPE TO GENERATE AT THE UNGA, PROBABLY A MORE HOSPITABLE FORUM THAN THE OAU AND ARAB LEAGUE HAVE PROVEN TO BE.

3. ALBIS THOUGHT THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE SAHARA COULD GO ON INDEFINITELY, BUT THAT DESPITE THE PULL-BACK OF ALGERIAN FORCES FROM THE FRONTIER, THERE IS STILL CONSIDERABLE DANGER OF SOME INCIDENT'S PROVOKING OPEN CONFLICT, THE MOST LIKELY BEING A LOCAL MOROCCAN COMMANDER'S DECISION TO FOLLOW "IN HOT PURSUIT" AN INVADING BANK RETURNING TO ALGERIA. HE THOUGHT HASSAN WISE ENOUGH TO ORDER NO SUCH MOVE AND THAT ALGERIA HAD EVERYTHING TO GAIN BY AVOIDING OPEN CONFLICT. IN ANY CASE, HE SAID, MAURITANIA REMAINS THE SOFT UNDER-BELLY THROUGH WHICH ALGERIA, ACTING THROUGH THE POLISARIO, CAN EASILY MAINTAIN PRESSURE.

4. ALGERIA, ALBIS CONTINUED, APPEARS TO BE LOWERING THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE SAHRAOUI GOVERNMENT AND RAISING IT ON POLISARIO, THUS KEEPING BOTH OPTIONS AVAILABLE. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT ALGERIA HAS BEGUN TO VIEW THE WORLD IN TERMS OF ITS OWN STRATEGIC INTERESTS MORE THAN THROUGH THE LENS OF THIRD WORLD IDEOLOGY. AND ITS "INTERESTS" ARE REALLY IMPERIALISTIC, SINCE ALGERIA HAS DESIGNS ON BOTH MOROCCO AND TUNISIA AND OBVIOUSLY SEES MOROCCAN CONTROL OF THE SAHARA AS DANGEROUS TO ITS ASPIRATIONS IN THE MAGHREB. ALBIS NOTED WITH CONCERN THE INCREASING ALGERIAN (AND LIBYAN) RELIANCE ON SOVIET ARMS AND GROWING SOVIET INFLUENCE IN NORTH AFRICA. HE VIEWED THIS AS PART OF THE CONTINUING POLARIZATION GOING ON IN AFRICA, WHICH IN THE LONG RUN CAN ONLY BE TO THE WEST'S DISADVANTAGE.

5. DESPITE THE "ALBIS THEORY" UNDER WHICH IMPROVED FRENCH RELATIONS WITH ONE NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRY ONLY RESULT IN AN EQUAL DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS WITH ANOTHER, THE SUM REMAINING CONSTANT, ALBIS SAID THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PARIS 28097 250528Z

FRANCE WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA. HE CLAIMED THAT THE MOROCCANS HAVE NOT YET INFORMED THE FRENCH ABOUT HOW THEY WISH TO HANDLE THE SAHARA QUESTION AT THE UNGA AND APPEAR TO BE RELAXED ABOUT THE PROBLEM.

RUSH

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